Sources for the Heritage Gardens Inventory of Northern Ireland

Belinda Jupp

The purpose of compiling the Inventory was to discover the past and present stock of parks, gardens and demesnes in the six counties of Northern Ireland. It was commissioned by the Northern Ireland Heritage Gardens Committee and, as the result of the allotted three-years work, was published in 1992 as the Heritage Gardens Inventory. The following is a personal account of a sample of the archival material encountered in the survey.

The Committee is an ad hoc body representing those with an interest in preserving historic sites and promoting research into the history of gardens and horticulture. It was established in 1980, with the original aim of preparing an inventory of outstanding parks and gardens to submit to the International Council on Monuments & Sites (ICOMOS). This organisation, which had provided the spur to garden history, had stated in article 9 of the 1981 Florence Charter: 'The preservation of historic gardens depends on their identification and listing.' As a result, the booklet Northern Gardens was published in 1982, containing an outline history of twenty six identified 'gardens of international importance'. These were reputedly selected with much angst by the founding Committee members. Following this pioneering work, it became clear that a more comprehensive, county-by-county, record of all significant sites was necessary to bring to the public arena what the Committee now realised was a substantial garden and gardening heritage.

The Committee gathered funds to bring this ambition to fruition. Most of the financing was to come from the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland under the auspices of Dr. Ann Hamlin, who by that time had become a valued member of the Committee. To facilitate the project, a junior fellowship for three years was established in the Institute of Irish Studies at The Queen's University, Belfast. From the outset, the survey was to be as full an historic search as was possible. Under direction from the Committee 'everything' was to be recorded, both extant and extinct. Article 15 of the Florence Charter noted the
necessity of ‘...thorough prior research...’ and accordingly the Inventory was to contain not only lists of sites but properly organised reference material collated as an archive. The ultimate aim of the Inventory and archive, apart from bringing the sites to public notice, was to be useful to individuals and organisations who might play a vital role in dictating the way that sites develop in the future. It was planned that those sites of particular merit and which met strict criteria, would eventually be placed on a Register, emulating work already undertaken in England and Wales. These would eventually be given statutory protection and in an ideal world, would be appreciated and conserved.

Garden history is a comparatively new field of study, which has gathered momentum in the last thirty or so years. There are no clear research paths. Source material comes from a wide diversity of disciplines such as history, geography, horticulture, architecture and the pictorial arts. Apart from finding the sites themselves, the creation of the archive was experimental and led down both well-trodden and more obscure routes. The members of the Committee were very helpful from the outset. Dr Charles Nelson recommended sites of horticultural importance, Hugh Dixon provided a list of historic houses with notable grounds, Margaret Garner extended an invitation to use her library and Dr Molly Sanderson made introductions to neighbouring owners.

This record of collected source material is in some ways very general and in others idiosyncratic in the choice of references mentioned. It would be impossible to cover every source but a personal selection hopefully can give a flavour of the background to the assemblage. The subject matter can conveniently be referred to as ‘sites’ but variously as gardens, demesnes and grounds wherever appropriate.

The starting point was to discover what was, or had been, there. The first task was systematically going through all editions of the six-inch Ordnance Survey County Series maps. The pleasure of looking at the expertly engraved first edition, published from 1833, was tempered by the lack of field boundaries and contours. Nevertheless, extant demesnes were easy to identify and more so in the second revision, published from 1845, where demesne areas were stippled with ‘demesne ruling’. Demesne land is that which the landowner held for his own use and would typically include the house at the centre, stables, home farm, and woodland. More importantly, demesnes contained ornamental grounds and often embellishments such as a grotto or summer house. Ordnance Survey twenty-five inch maps were published from 1887, during a time when estate land had started to be transferred from landlord to tenant. New houses and gardens appeared on
each edition. Public parks became features on later maps and were duly noted. Time limitations meant that it was not possible to record the numberless town gardens and smaller gardens in this survey. Although the maps were informative, not everything showed up. Many sites were ‘lost’ before the first edition was made. The former existence of known lost sites or those with scant surviving remnants were nevertheless to be noted.

Gradually the lists of sites grew and other questions had to be answered. For example, in what state were they and their component parts? Site visits became necessary. Historic sites included in the Inventory were designed landscapes of all shapes and sizes, encompassing small rock gardens, vast demesnes, nursery gardens and municipal parks. Each was unique and each one survived in different conditions. They ranged from the creation of one person or the result of activity spanning the centuries. Many are excellent examples of a particular acknowledged style; others may contain a notable and well-established plant collection; some may form an integral setting for buildings of historical importance or the creation of a particular designer. The very vibrant nature of gardens, with incessant growth and the changing of the seasons, makes them volatile and difficult to define. However, trees live for a very long time and their distribution within the landscape gives structure and continuity within the sites. Lay-out and land-form can survive for generations, displaying features such as canals, lakes, ponds, walls, paths and garden buildings. These are some of the principal items to be looked for in a site survey. The search also involves looking for what was there at different periods; layer upon layer. Early formal gardens were overlaid with the verdant pastures of the late 18th century ‘landscape’ style and subsequently overlaid again with multifarious Victorian flower beds or an arboretum of exotic trees. Studying the site, though pleasant in itself (in clement weather), needs a trained eye.

Site visits found owners very hospitable and interested in the project. Many coffees, lunches and teas were consumed in grand dining rooms or kitchens before or after informative tours. Both well-tended and fully-functioning large grounds or abandoned and bramble-filled skeletons were of interest. There were many beautifully maintained ornamental gardens and many that had passed their days of glory but were still essentially intact. It took time to walk miles, take photographs, fill in a pro-forma for each place and discover as much as possible about further sources. However a site survey does not tell the whole story. The usual research repositories had to be combed for documentary evidence to discover how, when and why sites evolved and developed.
At the time that the Inventory was compiled, the supply of secondary sources on established sites was small. It was dispiriting to discover that virtually the only book devoted to the topic was *Lost Demesnes – Irish Landscape Gardening 1660 to 1845* by Edward Malins and The Knight of Glin, published in 1976. Its companion, *Irish Gardens and Demesnes from 1830* by Malins and Patrick Bowe was published in 1980. Many of the grander sites in the north are referred to in these innovatory studies. The Ulster Architectural Heritage Society series, *Historic Buildings, Groups of Buildings, Areas of Architectural Importance* begun in the 1960s, was useful in identifying sites and for their analysis of garden buildings. R.M. Young’s *Belfast in the Province of Ulster in the 20th Century* published in 1909, contains pages devoted to grand and moderately sized houses, which would all have had some degree of ornamental surroundings worth investigating. Though there are few specific references to these grounds, one or two good photographs are included.

The unpublished in-depth historic landscape studies of National Trust properties, Castle Coole, Castle Ward, Florence Court, and Crom Castle by Thomas McErlean and Terence Reeves-Smyth were ground-breaking, to which there was nothing to add, as the work was already done. The guidance of these two experts was invaluable in the compilation of the Inventory and the archive. One or two coffee table books provided interest, for example, Sybil Connolly and Helen Dillon edited and published in 1986 *In An Irish Garden*, which consists of contemporary accounts written by the gardeners themselves, either of maintained old gardens or gardens that might turn out to be ‘heritage’ gardens of the future! No cut-off date had been set by the Committee.

As in all parts of the temperate world, horticulture emerged from agriculture. As far as is known the first organised gardens in Northern Ireland were monastic, in which herbs, fruit, flowers and vegetables would have been grown for culinary and medicinal purposes. These gardens disappeared following the dissolution of the monasteries but during the time of their existence, monks and friars introduced many plants into Ireland, which is not particularly rich in native flora.

The first informative pictorial representation of specific sites dates from the Plantation period. Many of Thomas Raven’s picture-maps depict buildings with their surrounding gardens. For example, the Skinners’ Building in Dungiven, Co.Londonderry of 1622 (Fig 1) shows a manor house and bawn enclosure, with a garden behind the house laid out in a formal manner in four plots, divided by paths. The garden is adjacent to the house, protected on two sides by walls and by the River Roe on the third side.
Fig 1. The Skinners' Building at Dungiven: detail of a picture-map by Thomas Raven 1622, T510/1, PRONI

Gardening activity is usually associated with times of peace but a curiosity was displayed in the exhibition of Ireland in the 1690s at the Ulster Museum in 1990, entitled ‘Kings in Conflict’. A reproduction of ‘A Ground Plot ye Strong Fort of Charlemont in Ireland’ by Samuel Hobson, reproduced from Story’s Continuation of 1693, shows the fort surrounded by orchards and gardens both in the town and ‘under Command of ye Fort.’

In another much later period of conflict, a plan of the town of Antrim in Sir Richard Musgrave’s Memoirs of the Different Rebellions in Ireland, of 1801, shows the formation of battle that took place in the summer of 1798 in the clearly delineated ‘Lord Massareens’s domain’ [sic], in which the walled garden is a
numbered feature and the woodland is called 'Close Planting'. Demesne, walled garden and wood survive today in much the same form in what is now a public park, Antrim Castle Gardens.

An unusual source is an interior family portrait of the 'Family of Thomas Bateson Esq.', attributed to Strickland Lowry and painted in 1762. The family wanted to commemorate not only their portraits but their property as well and this was managed by the clever device of displaying topographical paintings on the wall behind the figures. Though small, the picture on the right of their house and demesne at Orangefield, which has now gone, enables the viewer to see a large walled garden close to the house, with fields and woods extending out into the landscape, exemplifying this phase in garden history in Ireland. The portrait exhibits a family in a period of good fortune. As fortunes fluctuated, development and ornamentation of gardens reflected advantageous marriages, successful business ventures, good crops or other reasons that an enabled an owner to follow fashion and improve his house and grounds.

The essential starting point for tracing family history of the owners are the many editions of Sir Bernard Burke's Peerage, Barony and Knightage and A Genealogical & Heraldic History of the Landed Gentlemen of Ireland. Family and estate papers, available in the Public Record Office (NI) or in private hands, though irresistible, were noted in the archive for future reference for more in-depth studies. However estate maps were easily assimilated. These proliferated from the late 18th century and were drawn up to assist with the management of demesnes and estates during times of increased population and an interest in agricultural improvement.

In the same era that the Bateson portrait was painted, Mrs Delany, wife of the Dean of Down and sometime resident in Co.Down, sketched and wrote descriptions of gardens. On the 1st of October 1758 she wrote from Belvoir about a visit to another property at Hillsborough belonging to her host:

*The day cleared up; Lord Hillsborough, Mr Bayley and I walked round the improvements, a gravel path two Irish Miles long, the ground laid out in very good taste, some wood, some nurseries: shrubs and flowers diversify the scene, a pretty piece of water with an island in it, and all the views pleasant. D.D. and Sally saved themselves, as the ground was damp, for another walk, which was to a castle that Lord Hillsborough is building. [the D.D. referred to is her husband, Dr Delany and Sally is her goddaughter, Sally Chapone].

Though not informative in the detail, it is especially interesting as it refers to
the grounds of the former house, which are now under the lake. The ‘castle that Lord Hillsborough is building’, is the present house, Hillsborough Castle. Mrs Delany goes on to describe the gardens at the ‘old castle.’ (Hillsborough Fort), which had by then:

fallen to decay… the court behind it measures just an English acre, and is laid down in a bowling green, and round it is a raised high terrace, at each corner of which is a square of about fifty feet, which are to make four gardens, one for roses only, the other for all sorts of flowers – these on each side of the castle; the other two for evergreens and flowering shrubs.5

These gardens and the bowling green have also gone, so her observations and particularly the measurements, are intriguing. Mrs Delany’s sketches included studies of garden sites near the Delanys’ homes at Mount Panther and Hollymount.

Coinciding with the demise of the formal lay-out of grounds in favour of the English Landscape style at the end of the 18th century, professional artists were commissioned to produce topographical studies of great houses in their setting. The wonderfully picturesque location of many great houses in Ireland is emphasised and is still appreciated today. A period marked by the highest quality of landscape painting in Ireland provided many insights into the structure and features of individual sites. Thomas Roberts painted a series of views of Upper Lough Erne in the 1770s, which included a painting of the grounds of Bellisle, Co. Fermanagh6. John James Barralet’s work at Florence Court, Tollymore Park and Glenarm Castle was expertly engraved by Thomas Milton for publication from 1783 to 1793 in his Collection of Select Views of the Different Seats of the Nobility and Gentry in the Kingdom of Ireland. Jonathan Fisher also published his engraved drawings in sixty plates in his Scenery of Ireland in 1795, including a superb plate of Castle Ward house surrounded by parkland. Both Fisher and the accomplished landscape artist, William Ashford, painted Castle Ward and the pictures still hang in the house. Fisher also included an aquatint of Belleisle (Fig 2) in his book, drawn from the same position as the Roberts’ vista. The Belleisle depictions show an informal landscape in which a path meanders through parkland and leads to a gazebo in a sublime position on the lough shore. Other 19th century publications illustrated gentlemen’s seats in their surroundings. Specific to the environs of Belfast, Belfast Scenery, consists of Edward Proctor’s aquatints of Joseph Molloy’s drawings, which was published in 1832 as a series of thirty views of houses set in grounds. They are useful in that they show the not-so-grand homes that were being built in increasing numbers at that time but
their landscape setting, though doubtless in the fashion of the day, is remarkably similar in each site.

Mrs Delany was on her way to the Giant’s Causeway when she visited Hillsborough. From the late 18th century an increasing number of travellers journeyed round Ireland and recorded what they encountered and published their memoirs when they returned home. The Giant’s Causeway was a must on the Irish itinerary. Many either visited or stayed in houses along the way and wrote of their impressions of the state of the gardens. It was quite usual for strangers (of the right class) to call and view great houses and demesnes and references recall tours of the house by the housekeeper and the grounds by the head gardener. The travellers needed maps. George Taylor & Andrew Skinner’s Maps of the Roads of Ireland was published in 1778 and was probably a great boon at the time. The maps identify houses on either side of the roads, the names of the owners and surrounding trees, indicating grounds that might be worth further investigation. Some travellers observed with an expert eye, others were amateur and quixotic. Titles such as the Post Chaise Companion, which ran to several editions from 1786, Guide Through Ireland of 1838 and A Walking Tour Round Ireland in 1865, were intriguing and contained useful snippets. The most informative for Inventory purposes was Atkinson’s Ireland Exhibited to England in the 19th Century…, published in 1823. He showed a particular interest in the grounds and while most observers concentrated on the ornamental parts, he included this rare comment on a productive walled garden:
The garden of Fruit-hill [Drenagh, Co.Londonderry] is in tolerably good keeping with the other features of this place. It embraces an area of nearly three English acres, walled in, well stocked with fruit trees in full bearing, rather too well stocked with apple trees for the beauty of its appearance, (we speak not here of espaliers, which are ornamental, and are the only bearer of the apple that we would admit into a garden) and included every class of vegetables necessary for the consumption of a house... The demesne contains about 220 Conyngham acres, of a variable soil, all however fertile and productive, and evidently adapted to the growth of plants... 8

A German visitor, Johann George Kohl, made the general comment in his 1844 translated publication, Ireland, Scotland, England, (and Wales) that 'On the whole way from Belfast to Carrickfergus, the road is bordered by lines of country seats and gardens.'9 Most travellers’ tales are not wonderfully informative, as they deal with a host of subject matter but it is a bonus when they do identify sites because they note their condition at the time of the visit. Much more detail could be gleaned from the Ordnance Survey Memoir.

The Ordnance Survey Memoir, prior to its recent publication, was available in draft form when the garden Inventory was being put together. Written in the early 19th century as an adjunct to first complete mapping of Ireland, the Memoirs were compiled between 1830 and 1840. Their recorded comments and drawings provide a glimpse of life into part of pre-famine Ireland through the eyes of both military and civilian surveyors. They were intended to show in words what could not be shown cartographically. For the purposes of the Inventory, garden and demesne lay-outs could be analysed on the maps perfectly satisfactorily. Yet entries in the Memoirs described not only houses in their setting but what grew there, the climatic conditions and the state of the soil. However the quality, quantity and regional coverage of the observations are very variable and some areas were not mentioned at all. Where the entries are informative, as is the following on Greenmount, Co. Antrim, they are a valuable bonus for garden history:

Greenmount, the property of the Honourable and Reverend Archdeacon Agar, is situated in the townland of Tirgracey, about 1 mile south of Antrim and near the road leading from Antrim to Crumlin. The house, which is spacious, is a handsome and modern looking mansion, presenting an Ionic front consisting of a portico, and a balcony supported by 6 columns. The house is rather low and the view from it, except from the upper storey, is confined to the grounds. The offices, which are suitable, are near the house. The garden contains 6 acres 3 roods. It is walled and very well stocked. The hot house includes a tolerable grapery and pinery, which however from not keeping up the fires, are going to destruction. The demesne and
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grounds contain 160 acres, 39 of which are laid out in ornamental grounds and planting. There are three handsome ponds, a very pretty flower garden, many nice walks, a little temple with handsomely stained glass windows, all of which are quite out of order and in a state of neglect and ruin. Greenmount was built in 1820 by Robert Thompson Esquire. The front was added a few years after. In 1835 it came into the possession of Mr Agar and has not since been, nor is likely to be occupied.10

The basic lay-out and features at Greenmount have survived this period of neglect and remain to this day, interspersed with buildings for the horticultural college. But for the OSM nobody would ever have heard of the more ephemeral garden at Doraville, Co.Fermanagh, which boasted a ‘...choice and varied collection of dahlias.’11 Dahlias had been introduced to Britain from Mexico in 1789 and by 1830 there were nearly 60 garden varieties.

Writing specifically about gardens and gardening increased in earnest at the beginning of the 19th century. J.C. Loudon published his first Encyclopaedia of Gardening in 1822, which became extremely influential and was reprinted and re-edited until 1878. The early editions included site reports on gardens, including those in Ireland. Loudon made use of Statistical Surveys and County Guides, which were topographical surveys covering most counties of Ireland and included five (excluding Fermanagh) in the north, published in the early years of the 19th century. In the 1834 edition of the Encyclopaedia, Loudon utilises a descriptive quote on Downhill from the Statistical Survey of the County of Londonderry, published in 1802. The part quoted here is easy to envisage for those of us who know the site ‘...trees and hedges seem to fly from the enemy; their scanty growth sprouts all from the side most distant from the sea, leaving a ragged, wounded, and blighted rear to the destructive pursuer...’12 and it goes on to describes the condition of the Earl-Bishop of Derry’s ambitious planting between 1780 and 1787 of twenty thousand forest trees in the glens around an impossibly windswept site on the north coast headland.

During a time when many new plants were being introduced, Loudon encouraged owners to invigorate their ‘...neglected arboriculture and landscape gardens.’ In order to compile his eight volume work, Arboretum et Fruticetum Britannicum, Loudon sent out pro-formas to local observers and received feedback from amongst others, Earl Roden of Tollymore, Lord Viscount Ferrard of Antrim Castle and Sir Robert Bateson, the Batesons having moved by then from Orangefield to Moira. The gardens at Moira had been famous when the property of Sir Arthur Rawdon in the late 17th century. Loudon’s correspondents, while reporting on tree species and sizes, gave excellent retrospective accounts of
Rawdon's pioneering efforts as a distinguished plant collector. While the exotic plants from Jamaica that Sir Arthur had collected for him failed to thrive even under glass (the first glasshouses in Ireland were at Moira), they reported that John Templeton was successful in his experiments, begun in 1786, in growing camellias out of doors that were formerly always housed under glass. Templeton lived at Malone in Belfast and by was coincidence custodian of trees planted in Sir Arthur Rawdon's generation, 'Crann-more (sic), that is, Great tree, in honour of the very fine chestnut trees which are in front of the house, and which were probably planted in the 17th century.' Two enormous sweet chestnut trees (Fig 3) still grow in front of the (now ruinous) house. Moira Demesne is a public park today and few venerable trees survive. The very equable climate of most parts of the north of Ireland enables a vast range of plants from the temperate world to be successfully grown.

A curious and individual source, discovered on a site visit, is a tablet of stone in a field at Holestone in Co. Antrim, on which is engraved '2,500 forest trees planted by William Owen on this farm from the year 1791 – 1802'. Very fine
stands of beech survive at Holestone and can thus be accurately dated. This is a clue to the intense tree planting at that period. Ireland was (and still is) seriously lacking in tree cover and this was acknowledged in seventeen Acts from 1698 aimed at encouraging planting. An Act of 1765 required that if all trees planted were registered with a Justice of the Peace, a tenant could claim the trees or their value when the lease expired. Amongst these ledgers in the Public Record Office is a section published in 1984 in *A Register of Trees for Co. Londonderry 1768-1811* that contains numbers and species of tree, by whom they were planted, year of planting and the townland in which they were planted.

Many arboreta were planted during the 19th century and a spate of interest in collecting plants from overseas increased at the beginning of the 20th-century, headed by Lord Annesley of Castlewellan Castle. He published a limited edition on his own collection, *Beautiful and Rare Trees and Plants*, in 1903. The existence of both this and Sir John Ross of Bladensburg’s *List of Trees and Shrubs Grown in the Grounds of Rostrevor House, Co.Down* of 1911 were noted in the archive. Sir John amassed a superb collection, which grew to perfection in the clement climate of Rostrevor. Alas, it has all but gone but is remembered from his limited publication. When Lady Edith Londonderry came to Mount Stewart in the 1920s, she sought advice from Sir John. No garden survey can ignore the wonderful gardens at Mount Stewart but like other renowned and well-recorded gardens there was not much new to discover.

Detailed descriptions of Mount Stewart and Rowallane are to be found in *Country Life*. Specialist magazines and journals, though mainly interested in plants and design details, proved a fruitful source. A long-lasting journal *Irish Gardening*, was published from 1906 to 1922 and in Vol. III, 1908, there is a delightful photo of an idyllic cottage garden at ‘The Orchard’ in Enniskillen. (Fig 4) The photo inspired a visit, but alas the place had gone. Some years ago the late owner had grubbed up all his orchard trees because he had been driven to distraction by boys from nearby Portora (Royal Grammar School) stealing his apples. Articles in journals were the major source of information on 20th-century gardens.

All the well-known collections of photographs, the Lawrence Collection and those by Welch, Hogg and Green, are collated and available to view. They have all provided a rich source of images captured at specific moments in time. They belong to a era which was a hey-day for gardens, when they were maintained to the highest standard and gardeners were plentiful. Surprisingly, few family snaps turned up in owners’ albums, though amateur paintings are treasured.
Watercolours by a member of the Close family are the only remaining memory of the lovely early 20th century gardens at Drumbanagher, Co.Armagh. The house (but for the porte-cochère) and garden have completely disappeared. Nancy Jury captured the garden at Brooklands, Co.Antrim in full glory, which was designed to compliment her father’s ‘Arts and Crafts’ house, built in 1909. The then fashionable Italianate terrace at Drumcairne House, Co.Tyrone, was painted in 1914 by, ‘a female member of the Caulfield family’ and is now in the collection of the Armagh County Museum (Fig 5). In spite of always having to be wary of artistic license when interpreting a painting or drawing on the ground, in the last two cases the remnants of the gardens, as see today, show that they were convincingly represented.

The few examples quoted here are intended to give an impression of the type of evidence that can be collected for research into our garden history. In common with all research topics, the subject was open-ended and the project in question had a time-limit. Most of the documentary and pictorial material is well-known but in this particular survey anything extant was looked at in conjunction with site surveys, although early gardens that are no longer evident on the ground are only remembered through paper searches. It is obvious from the small sample quoted here that the quality and quantity of material taken, site by site, varied enormously. The sources offer inconsistent coverage of individual sites and (with the exception
Fig 5.
Drumcairne Formal Garden (1914) by a member of the Caulfield family. Photograph reproduced with kind permission of the Trustees of the Museums & Galleries of Northern Ireland.
of the OS maps), as a whole over the six counties. By the time the research project came to an end, over 600 sites had been recorded. There is a brief description of each in the publication, in which they are uneasily categorised to ICOMOS European standardisation. The archive is in the Monuments and Buildings Record held by Built Heritage, Environment and Heritage Service, Department of Environment (NI). The information is there to be processed, both as ‘avenues to the past’ for further research or to look to the future, should enhancement plans or threats involve any of the parks, gardens or demesnes.

NOTES
1. Most full titles of books and dates of publication are given in the text. Where they are not, they and unpublished works are cited in the endnotes.
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